

# On Writing the Script for a Digital Story

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Think of digital stories as "scrapbook television" made on the kitchen table, with feeling.

There's a strictness to the construction of a Digital Story: **Two hundred and fifty words, a dozen or so pictures, and two minutes is about the right length.** These strictures, I find, make for elegance. Digital Stories are a bit like sonnets in this respect, multimedia sonnets from the people (only it's probably better when they don't rhyme).

**Digital Stories are short, personal, multimedia tales, told from the heart. Anyone can make them and publish them on screens anywhere. They have the potential to be a very democratic kind of storytelling.**

In a five-day Digital Storytelling workshop we spend almost **half of the time working on scripts.** We may be *digital* storytellers but, if we have no story, then we have no reason even to switch on our computers, except perhaps to use the word processor. Time spent polishing a story idea, writing the script and preparing the pictures is time well spent. Here are some pointers to help you along the way.

**A script is more than just words**

**A Digital Story is a personal story told from the heart, that is, with feeling. A Digital Story makes frequent use of the word "I". The narrative of a Digital Story is revealed in both pictures and words.**

Although carefully scripted, **a voice-over is written to be spoken.** No one listening can see spelling errors or bad grammar so **write it as you would speak it,** it's not an address or a lecture. The voice-over is not just words, **it's about the way you speak those words. Your voice is unique and its sound is important to the meaning of your story.** You are not an announcer. You are not merely performing lines. **You are narrating the story as you would tell it to a friend.** If you "posh it up" or use a manner of speaking which is not your own, you will spoil it. **Be yourself.**

**A great script doesn't always make a great voice-over**

For a story of two minutes, the **script should be about 250 words long.** Be aware, though, that most films benefit from **pauses,** gaps in the voice-over where the **pictures are allowed to carry the narrative by themselves.** It can also be useful to **vary the pace of your delivery — slow bits and fast bits.**

**The precise word count is less important than the rhythm with which the words are delivered**

**A story is like a journey** and it is very easy to set off in the right direction and yet never reach your destination. When you get to the end you should be able — as it were — to look back over your shoulder and still see the place you set out from. So, while you are writing, keep asking yourself: "What is my story about?" Do not include anything which dilutes the story's intention.

**In a two minute piece there is plenty of time to lose your way**

There is never any need to describe what the viewer can already see, or *vice versa*. For example: let's say your story includes a colour picture of a stylish middle-aged woman with a big smile and bright orange hair. She is standing in a kitchen and, though smartly dressed, she wears an apron. On the table in front of her is a rolling pin and a lump of dough. Unedited, your voice-over might read: "My grandmother was very stylish. She took a great pride in what she wore even though she was always in the kitchen baking. She had a trim figure and dyed her grey hair bright orange. She had a wonderful laugh and always smelt expensive." (A total of 44 words).

**Think how few words and pictures you need to tell the story, not how many**

Edited, the passage might read: "My grandmother had a wonderful laugh and always smelt expensive."  
(Just 10 words, saving 34 words).

The point here is that **it is only necessary to tell us things that we cannot work out for ourselves by looking at the picture** and, even then, only things which keep the story moving on.

**Music can be useful when it comes to creating mood** and it's always more satisfying to use music and sound effects which you have created for yourself. If you aren't musical (is there anyone out there who *never* hums a tune or whistles one occasionally?) then work with a friend who is. Digital Storytellers use sound effects sparingly.

**Music can very easily create the wrong mood**

There are no right or wrong ways of telling a story, only **clear ways**.

**And finally...**